IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1. (Previously Presented): A process for the continuous preparation of chlorine comprising:

reacting hydrogen chloride with oxygen in the presence of a heterogeneous catalyst, wherein the conversion of hydrogen chloride in a single pass through the reactor is restricted to 15 to 90 %,

wherein some or all of the unreacted hydrogen chloride is recirculated, and

wherein the proportion of recirculated hydrogen chloride is gradually increased during the time of operation of the catalyst.

Claim 2. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein of the unreacted hydrogen chloride is recirculated.

Claim 3. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the hydrogen chloride conversion in a single pass is restricted to 20 to 80 %.

Claim 4. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the hydrogen chloride conversion in a single pass is restricted to 25 to 70 %.

Claim 5. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the hydrogen chloride conversion in a single pass is restricted to 30 to 60 %.

Claim 6. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the heterogeneous catalyst used is a doped or undoped supported ruthenium catalyst.

Claim 7. (Canceled).

Claim 8. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction is carried out using from 2 to 10 reactors connected in series.

Claim 9. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 8, wherein the introduction of oxygen is divided over a plurality of reactors.

Claim 10. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the ratio of hydrogen chloride to oxygen at the inlet to the reactor ranges from 1:1 to 20:1.

Claim 11. (Previously Presented): The process of claim 1, wherein the ratio of hydrogen chloride to oxygen at the inlet to the reactor ranges from 3:1 to 5:1.